

ENGLISH

Belonging can be complex, transitory or ambivalent.

Evaluate with reference to the prescribed text and 2 other related texts of your own choosing.

The notion that belonging may be complex, transitory or ambivalent is one which, universally true, indicates the capacity for belonging to induce feelings of both inclusion and exclusion simultaneously. Belonging, be it spiritual, emotional or physical, is a basic and intrinsic need which is manifested within the poetry of Emily Dickinson, namely 'A Narrow Fellow in the Grass' and 'I Had Been Hungry All the Years'. The complexities undermining and defining the nature of belonging are also evident in a poem 'Refugee Blues', by W.H. Auden, and Trevor Nickolls' painting 'From Dreamtime 2 Machinetime'.

Dickinson's poem 'A Narrow Fellow in the Grass' is indicative of the ability of belonging to induce feelings of both comfort and alienation, addressing the persona's yearning to belong and his connection to nature. Insisting that "several of nature's people/I know, and they know me;/ I feel for them a transport/ Of cordiality", the persona's use of inverted syntax draws attention to his apparent relationship with nature. However, the ambivalence of the concept of belonging is clear when the persona, despite his desire to belong, is unable to totally do so. This is evident in the dynamic nature of his relationship, his tone changing from his congenial, light-hearted reference to the snake as "fellow" at the beginning of the poem, to a representation of his fear by the fifth stanza. Stating "tighter breathing/ And zero at the bone", this imagery illustrates the physical effects of fear, that of quickened breathing and a freezing chill, illustrating the persona's ultimate separation from nature.

Dickinson then negates the possibility of the persona forging a connection with nature, using the metaphor that "he likes a...floor too cool for corn". Using corn as a symbol for human civilisation, this shows that nature remains distant and mysterious. This volatile relationship thus demonstrates the complexities of belonging and not belonging.

Similarly, the notion of belonging is explored in Dickinson's poem 'I Had Been Hungry All the Years', which uses the metaphor of 'hunger', a basic physical need, as a representation of the persona's desire. Dickinson explores this in relation to spiritual beliefs, apparent in her reference to "curious wine" and "ample bread", common symbols of Christianity. Noting that "I looked in windows for the wealth/I could not hope for mine", the imagery of windows is suggestive of the persona's separation, who, able to see and understand the sense of belonging which religious faith brings to others, cannot personally accept or connect to it. She realises that it could not bring the same sense of fulfilment to her, instead suggesting that "the plenty hurt me", the result of her attempts to compromise herself in order to belong.

The complexity of belonging is further explored through the emotions of the persona; despite her efforts to belong, she is left feeling alienated and uncomfortable. This is clear in the simile "myself felt ill and odd/ As berry of a mountain bush/ Transplanted to the road", describing her sense of dislocation. The poem creates a comparison between the persona's expectations of fulfilment, and the fleeting sense of belonging which soon gives way to pain and discomfort. This causes her to recognise that "nor was I hungry", the extended metaphor of hunger now revealing her choice not to belong, extending her own sense of identity.

The ability for texts to challenge the audience's perspectives on belonging is explored not only in Dickinson's poetry, but in 'Refugee Blues', by W.H. Auden. Identified as a 'German Jew' during the Nazi epoch, the persona describes a sense of isolation resulting from the stereotypes projected onto him. The poem creates a tension between the construction of a generic identity for the 'German Jews', and the deterioration of individuality. This is evident when Hitler, personified as thunder, insists "they must die", referring only to a generalised stereotype. Here Auden seeks to

subvert the vilification of the Jewish people, challenging the audience's understanding of belonging and not belonging. This sense of isolation is clear when the persona states "yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us". Here the persona's repetition reinforces his sense of alienation, and the physical effects of not belonging. This is further represented through the metaphor of a "building with a thousand floors", symbolic of the numerous opportunities available in the world. The persona, stating "not one of them was ours", thus uses contrast to highlight the despair and desperation of his categorisation as a 'German Jew'.

Finally, Trevor Nickolls' painting 'From Dreamtime 2 Machinetime' addresses the artist's own conflict between his Aboriginal heritage and his place in the Western world. Caught at the interface of two cultures, Nickolls' attempts to belong within each culture ensure his exclusion from each and the destruction of his personal identity. This conflict is represented in the divided composition of the painting, and the stark contrast between the two halves. On one half, Nickolls portrays the traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, using a light, varied colour palette of warm red and yellow ochres. The sun is shining, the woman is smiling and the trees, personified to resemble human beings, are indicative of the Aboriginal spiritual connection to nature and the landscape. Conversely, the bleak greys of the other half depict the industrialisation of the Western world, the buildings making it appear cramped and commercialised. The three figures are unhappy and vegetation is scarce, demonstrating the artist's anguish at his progressively detached relationship with nature. It is in this way that Nickolls' cultural sense of belonging is subverted by his yearning to belong to two different cultures, negating his capacity to belong to either.

Therefore it is clear that the complex nature of belonging embodies such notions as the ambivalence of belonging and not belonging, and the often transient feelings of inclusion and exclusion. Often playing a key role in the creation and destruction of identity, belonging illustrates a capacity to create dilemmas through its very nature as a transitory and ambiguous concept.